1: Freeman E-5 (1949-1951)1955 OC6 Iban OC6

did happen that the first *manggol* rites marking the formal inauguration of the agricultural year were performed on Wednesday, 1st June, but because of abnormally wet weather, the firing of the farms was seriously delayed, and sowing did not begin until 18th September.

The Rites of Manggol

85. The rites of *manggol* which mark the inauguration of the agricultural year are elaborate. They begin with a general ceremony, conducted by the *tuai burong*, or augur of the community, which all *bilek* families are at liberty to attend. Thereafter, however, each *bilek* family performs its own rites in the manner which its senior members think fit. The main purposes of the *manggol* rites are: (*a*) the procuring of auspicious bird omens; (*b*) the propitiation of the spirits of the earth and the jungle; and (*c*) the inauguration of the major operation of felling, by the use of ritual whet-stones (*batu manggol*). The whole process takes from about twenty days to a month. These intricate rituals will be discussed in detail in my study of the Iban *padi* cult; all that need concern us here is the fact that the *manggol* rites mark the beginning of the first stage in the labour cycle—the clearing of the undergrowth.

Clearing the Undergrowth

86. The clearing (*tebas*; v.f. *nebas*) of the undergrowth is a clearly defined operation, and not until it has been completed, does the felling proper (*tebang*, v.f. *nebang*) begin. The process is a gradual one, for it is geared to the performance of a series of rituals. On the first day, an area of not more than one or two square poles is cleared, and only small saplings slashed. On ensuing occasions longer and longer periods are devoted to *nebas*, and not only saplings, ferns and creepers and the like, but young trees (i.e. up to about 3–4 inches in diameter) are cut down; until finally, every kind of growth which can be tackled with a bush-knife, or *duku*, has been cleared away. This use of the bush-knife as a tool is the distinguishing feature of the *nebas* stage. Again, because the bush-knife is so easy to handle, both women and boys are able to join in the work.

Felling the Jungle

87. When the preliminary clearing of undergrowth has been completed, the men move on to the much more arduous and difficult task of tree felling. If the farm be in virgin jungle (*kampong*), the smaller trees are dealt with first, and the giants, which may be 150–200 feet in height, and 15 feet and more in girth, are left till last. Felling such trees, often on steep and broken hill-sides, is an undertaking which calls for strength, dexterity, agility and nerve. But these are qualities which the Iban cherish, and which every young man of ambition hopes to develop. Tree felling, particularly in virgin jungle, is the man's task par excellence; an occasion for the demonstration of skill and daring, an opportunity for a young man to establish himself among his peers. In every community there are men of outstanding prowess, who excel in tackling the more difficult giants which are always left till last, and have the special name of *galau*. Felling these *galau* is a pastime not without hazard, for it can happen that one of them, on falling, will recoil—suddenly and without warning—and crush the axeman before he has had time to escape. The adventures and misadventures of *nebang* are a favourite topic of Iban men, and each year as the new season approaches old stories are told anew, and the tasks that lie ahead relished in advance. Sometimes, indeed, a man will lay claim to a tree which for some reason or other has

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taken his fancy, or which, perhaps, he views as a challenge to his skill. In Iban ritual invocations (*timang*), the prowess of their gods and culture heroes in felling immense and primordial trees is a recurrent theme. Tree felling is the one activity of the farming year in which young men revel, and in many cases it is the only stage in which they deign to participate, for after it is over they set off on journeys (*bejalai*), and do not return until the harvest is well advanced and the crop ready to be carried in and threshed.

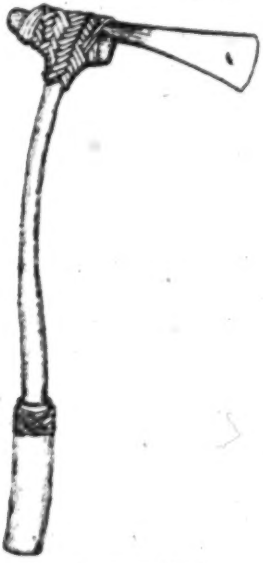

Figure 3. An Iban *bliong*

88. In tree felling two main tools are used: (*a*) the *bliong*, an hafted adze; and (*b*) the *kapak*, an axe of European type. The *bliong* is the traditional implement of the Iban, and they are expert at forging their own adzes and hafting them to hard-wood shafts with *rotan* lashings (Figure 3). Different men have different notions as to the exact size, weight and shape of adze best suited to felling, and many have a favourite *bliong* that is highly prized for its special qualities. At the beginning of each season the blades are re-forged, new cutting edges formed and tempered, and then ground on large whet stones to a fine pitch of sharpness. Axe-heads of European type, on the other hand, are purchased from Chinese traders, but in most cases they are partly re-forged, and handles of Iban design specially fitted. In passing, it may be noted that the Iban system of agricluture, involving as it does, the felling of large areas of virgin jungle, is dependent on the use of iron tools. Such extensive methods could not be followed by a neolithic people. There is however, no archaeological evidence concerning the neolithic period of the Iban, nor is there any mention in their traditions of stone tools. This is not surprising, for metals were in widespread use in eastern Asia and Indonesia for many centuries prior to the first arrival of Europeans. Our earliest historical accounts of the Iban describe a highly developed material culture based on the use of iron tools. Low, in recording observations made during the years 1845-47, wrote of the Iban: "Iron being necessary in the formation of their

1: Freeman E-5 (1949-1951)1955 OC6 Iban OC6

weapons of war, they have studied, and brought to greater perfection its workmanship than others of the mechanical arts;" and he suggests that prior to European contact, the Iban may have "fused and wrought the ore of the island," as did certain Kayan and other tribes.[1] This is one possibility, though it is probable that for many centuries the Iban have maintained economic relationships (similar to those existing to-day), with Chinese and Malay traders, with metal objects, ceramics and beads as their principal purchases; and indeed, it may well be that the Iban were in possession of iron before their arrival in Borneo.

89. To facilitate the felling of large trees, which are always left till last, the Iban construct a special scaffolding, or *tundan* (Plate 7). This is a rough structure of stout poles, lashed together with creepers, and often reaching a height of fifteen to twenty feet from the ground. The purpose of these *tundan* is to lift the axe-man above the buttress roots—which are a feature of so many Borneo trees—and so lighten his task. To commence with, it is usual for two axe-men to work on the same staging, but as the felling approaches its climax, one of them always leaves, and stands well clear, ready to shout advice to his companion. The man left behind continues with the felling until a creaking and rending of timber announces that the giant is about to fall; then, flinging aside his axe, he darts down the slender poles of the rickety scaffolding, and scampers away to a point where recoil is no longer a danger. As the massive tree crashes to the ground, there are shouts of triumph (*manjong*), and the workers scramble forward to see if it has fallen as they had planned. Accomplished axe-men pride themselves on their ability to fell a tree in exactly the direction they choose, and sometimes, by felling a series of trees end to end, they contrive to produce a kind of raised pathway of huge trunks, bridging hollows and depressions in the surface of the farm.

90. The clearing of secondary jungle (*damun*) is a very different sort of task. In its early stages (e.g. during the first five or six years of regeneration), the standard method is slashing with a bush-knife, and in this work women and boys commonly participate. The traditional Iban system of land usage is to cultivate a patch of land for two years in succession, or several times within a brief span of years, and then to let it revert to secondary jungle, for as long a period as possible—usually for about fifteen years. Such secondary jungle is called *damun*, and after fifteen or twenty years it contains trees of two to three feet in girth, between which there thrives a tangle of undergrowth. This *damun* is markedly different in composition from virgin jungle, and its character varies according to the kind of usage to which the land has been previously subjected. A preliminary clearing (*nebas*) of undergrowth is almost always necessary, and, as in the case of virgin jungle, a bush-knife is used, and both boys and women join in the task. After *nebas* has been completed, the operation of *nebang*, or felling, follows. In *damun* this is a straight-forward undertaking, without the technical difficulties and attendant dangers of felling virgin jungle, and it can be achieved in something like a quarter of the time. An axe (*kapak*) is the chosen implement, and the workers move methodically up a slope felling the trees at about waist height. As we have seen, the work of clearing the jungle, in readiness for the all-important burn, begins early in June, when the rites of *manggol* are embarked upon. Conditions vary very widely from farm to farm, but even in the case of difficult *kampong*, felling is usually completed by mid-July, or at least by the beginning of August.

[1] Hugh Low, "Sarawak," 1848, p. 209.

1: Freeman E-5 (1949-1951)1955 OC6 Iban OC6

of land usage are complex. There is however, one general feature of especial 311
significance: *a marked tendency (particularly when working virgin forest) to farm land for two years in succession, before letting it revert to secondary jungle.* I want to stress the prevalence of this practice from the outset, for it is of the greatest consequence that Government officers should be fully aware of its existence. In the past there seems to have been a general impression that after each harvest "a bush fallow period of from 12-15 years" was always observed before another crop was taken. When I first reported the existence of '*krukoh farming*' (i.e. the taking of two consecutive crops from the same piece of land), I was told, by officers of experience, that I was mistaken for it was well known that the Iban did not farm in this way. Yet, as we shall see, *krukoh* farming is a time-honoured Iban custom, which has had a most deleterious effect on hundreds of square miles of land—in the Third Division and many other parts of the territory of Sarawak.

The Predilection of the Iban for Virgin Jungle

265. Every land usage cycle begins with the felling of virgin jungle. During the past hundred years, many thousands of acres of primeval forest in the Rejang basin have been felled by Iban axes, and in the Baleh (and other similar pioneer areas) this onslaught is still going on. From the historical survey (presented in Part II of this report) of the Iban occupation of the Batang Rejang and its tributary rivers and streams, it emerges clearly that the Iban are a virile and resourceful people with an insatiable appetite for virgin land. The motives which prompt this appetite are many. Foremost is the knowledge that, given good weather, two and more crops of exceptional abundance may be harvested from an *umai kampong*. In their prayers (*sampi*) at the time of *pemanggol*, the Iban ask for: [762]

> "Land that is fat, fat in deep layers,
> Luxuriant land, land that is fruitful,
> Soil soft and fecund, land richly fertile;"

and they know that this is most likely to be found in tracts of *kampong*, on untouched slopes and terraces, where the humus of centuries lies thickly. The labour expended on an *umai kampong* is heavy, but it holds high promise of a surplus—a surplus that leads to property and prestige and all the other things most desired by Iban hearts.

266. By felling virgin forest a family obtains rights of ownership over land, 311
rights of usufruct over the secondary jungle which in due course springs up; and 423
by Iban *adat* these rights are permanently vested in the family and its heirs for as 556
long as they elect to exercise them. Among shifting cultivators like the Iban land is of pre-eminent importance. Land is wealth, and upon its land holdings depend the prosperity and indeed, the very subsistence of a *bilek* family. Under these conditions access to virgin territory is a prerogative of the utmost consequence, for it presents a family with the opportunity to expand its wealth and attain a position of economic security. There is no need to wonder at the "land-rush" which marked the opening of the rich forest lands of the Baleh to Iban settlement. The well-being of many an Iban family springs from the privileged position it gained in that scramble.

267. The cultivation of virgin jungle brings innumerable minor advantages. 311
Timber for building, for making canoes and a score of different implements, [313
rotan for mats and baskets, palm fronds for thatching, iron-wood for roof 314]
shingles, resin for lighting, bark for *padi* bins—all these things lie close at hand. Indeed, the whole material culture of the Iban is based on the rain-forest, and in

[See pp. 11-26, Cat. 116.—Analyst]

1: Freeman E-5 (1949-1951)1955 OC6 Iban OC6

NOTES ON PHOTOGRAPHIC PLATES

Frontispiece. A view of the *padi* farm of the *bilek* family of Kubu, Rumah Nyala, Sungai Sut, in 1950. This farm was one of a series that extended along the crest of a 800ft.—900ft. ridge overlooking the headwaters of the Sungai Nyunggau and the main valley of the Baleh river. (See Sketch Maps 1 and 3). Cleared from virgin jungle in 1949, the land is being cultivated for the second year in succession. In the foreground, young *padi* and cassava plants are springing up. Beyond the farm hut (on the open platform of which are Kubu's wife and grandson), Kubu's farm extends towards that of his neighbour, Kamba (the augur of Rumah Nyala), whose farm hut can also be discerned. Virgin jungle (*kampong*) is still standing on the spur in the right background, while to the left are slopes thickly covered with young secondary growth (*dijap kampong*). Photograph taken on 23rd December, 1950, by Mr. B. E. Smythies.

1. Iban farm clearings in Sungai Saban, Ulu Sut, Kapit District, Third Division, Sarawak. Photograph taken on 3rd September, 1949, just before the firing of the farms. In the background is Mt. Goram (3,073 ft.).

2. A farm clearing (*umai*) in virgin jungle (*kampong*) in the Upper Batang Baleh, Kapit District. Photograph taken on 27th February, 1949, when the farm was covered with a heavy crop of *padi*. In the lower right hand corner is part of the roof of the farm house (*dampa*) from which the land was worked. Note tree stumps with buttress roots.

3. Dampa Adin, one of the subsidiary farm houses of Rumah Nyala, Sungai Sut, Kapit District. On 20th February, 1951, when this photograph was taken Dampa Adin housed 12 *bilek* families. The woman on the open platform (*tanju*) is tending *padi* that is being sunned prior to pounding.

4. The pattern of Iban agriculture: from the long-house in the valley the surrounding hills have been brought into cultivation. (For this photograph taken in Sungai Bangkit, Kapit District, I am indebted to Mr. B. E. Smythies).

5. An Iban farm (*umai*) in Sungai Tiau, Ulu Mujong, Kapit District. Photograph taken on 8th December, 1949, when the land was covered with young *padi*. To the left is a grove of sago palms, grown as a scarcity crop. In the valley, a watch-house (*langkau umai*) is in course of construction.

6. Dampa Along, one the subsidiary farm houses of Rumah Nyala, Sungai Sut, Kapit District. This *dampa*, occupied by three *bilek* families, was still in course of construction when this photograph was taken on 24th September, 1949, and only the central family had finished building the open platform (*tanju*) of its apartment. The felled secondary jungle (*damun*) shown in the background had been fired two days previously, but the burn was a very poor one.

7. Felling in virgin jungle (*kampong*). The axe-man is standing on a scaffolding (*tundan*) which lifts him above the buttress roots of the tree. Photograph taken on 1st August, 1949, Sungai Sut, Kapit District.

8. After the felling: secondary jungle (*damun*) drying in the sun. Photograph taken on 28th July, 1949, Sungai Sut, Kapit District.

1: Freeman E-5 (1949-1951)1955 OC6 Iban OC6

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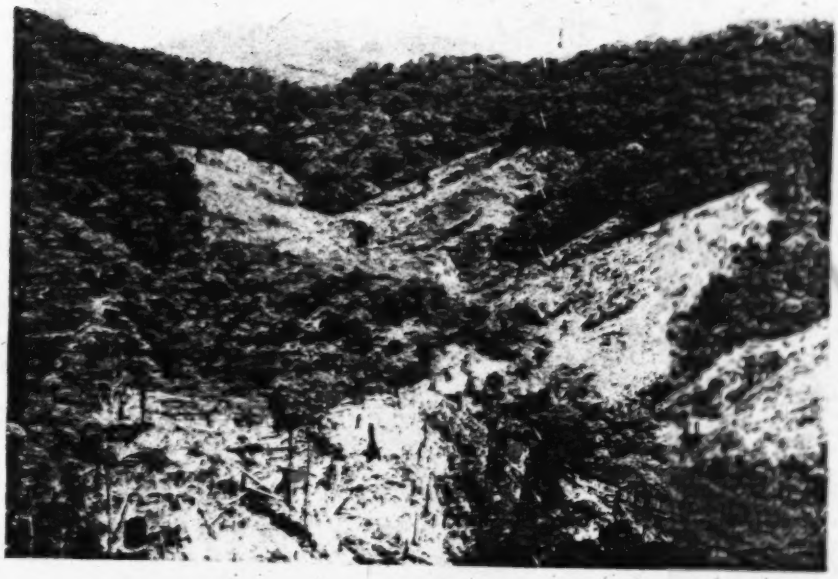

Plate 1. Iban farm clearings in Sungai Saban, Ulu Sut, Kapit District, Third Division, Sarawak.

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Plate 2. Farm clearing in virgin jungle, Upper Batang Baleh, Kapit District

1: Freeman E-5 (1949-1951)1955 OC6 Iban OC6

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Plate 7. Felling virgin jungle.

Plate 8. Newly felled secondary jungle (*damun*) drying in the sun.

4: Roth E-4 (no date) 1891 OC6 Iban OC6

512 515 few minutes in the sun before putting on their *chawats* (loin-cloths).

512 462 264 231 Their next duty is to prepare the morning meal. They eat with the men or not as they please, but they generally prefer to feed with the children after the men have finished. When breakfast is all over they clean up the crockery and brush the floor. The pigs and poultry are fed with the refuse, as are also the dogs.

512 462 244 262 They are now ready to accompany the men to the farm, or if not required they pursue their own occupations, which are various and manifold. As it is necessary to provide vegetables for the next meal, they visit their gardens for this purpose and bring home with them whatever they may be able to find in them, viz.:—cucumbers, pumpkins, melons, capsicums, &c. Tapioca leaves, cucumber leaves, and sweet-potato leaves are used by them as much as anything else, and they are fond of them when boiled in water.

512 462 251 313 264 Sometimes they go out fishing with scoop nets when they have the time to spare, or are desirous of a change of diet. It is the business of the men to provide pork, venison, and fresh fish, but the preserving is done by the women, who smoke or pickle according to fancy. There is never a want of firewood in a Dyak house; one of the first duties of a husband is to provide this, or he gets into bad odour with his wife or mother-in-law. The wood is smoked until every particle of moisture is evaporated out, and it becomes quite brittle and hard. If the women go out in the forenoon upon expeditions of the above kind, they have to be back again by the middle of the day to cook the mid-day meal. If they are busy on the farm, and mean to make a day of it with the family, they take what rice they require with them early in the morning and cook it on the spot to avoid the journey to and fro.

512 462 252 At two o'clock in the afternoon they pound a measure of paddy with heavy wooden pestles to free it from the husk; each woman is provided with a wooden mortar which is placed either in the *tempuan* or thoroughfare, or inside the *bilieh* or room, and two women pound away at each. At 4 p.m. they bathe, and at 5 p.m. they are busy cooking for the third and last meal of the day. After the things are cleared away they hang up the mosquito curtains, and put the children to bed, while they sit up for an hour or two to converse with the men, and retire to rest when tired.

512 462 [854] In addition to the above routine of daily labour, they have a variety of things to do, and are never idle. They have to fetch drinking water and to nurse the babies, and when they are tired of carrying them about in their arms, they strap them on to their back with A cloth.

5: Roth E-4 (no date) 1892 OC6 Iban OC6

marked tendency among the tribes to demand a heavier rent—in fact several dollars a year. The tenure, too, has been modified within late years in view of the increasing demand for accommodation, and it is now generally understood that when the proprietor chooses to leave the district and remove into a distant country he forfeits, by so doing, all title to the ground and can no longer exact rent.

Agriculture with the Sea Dyaks is in a very backward condition, but they contrast very favourably with the Malay population in the vicinity. Neither use the plough nor buffalo, but the former cultivate on a more extensive scale and with a more provident idea. They grow, both individually and collectively, far more than they require for their own consumption, and with the residue they purchase necessaries, such as salt, steel, iron, and luxuries, such as personal ornaments, for their families. If the harvest has been really plentiful they are even able to afford to purchase gongs and toddy, and perhaps a jar or two.

As a rule they prefer to cultivate hilly soil, but some few have learnt to utilize the wet land. Their farming operations are regulated by the position in the heavens of the Seven Stars of the Pleiades. They commence business towards the end of the dry season, July and August, so that they have the wet monsoon to bring the paddy to maturity, and the beginning of the following fine weather, April and May, to ripen the grain.

The old jungle is called *kampong*, and the new is called *temuda*. The Dyaks prefer infinitely to farm the former whenever it is to be obtained within reasonable distance of the village, and when it is getting scarce in their immediate neighbourhood they shift their residence nearer to it. In parts of the country more populous than others, it frequently happens that the Dyaks have not in their territory any old jungle; such situations are not so laborious to prepare, but being destitute of the rich layer of vegetable mould and the fertilizing properties of burnt wood, are not nearly so productive. After having felled the old jungle and farmed on it once, they leave it for seven years to grow up again and are then ready to use it a second time. The first year's growth is called *kruaoh*.

When it is intended to open out new country, the first thing to be done is for every family to select an eligible piece of forest land and to mark out the quantity they wish to cultivate. The next step is to *beburong*, that is to say to consult the omen birds of the tribe to learn whether or no they approve of this choice. For this purpose they erect a hut first in one quarter then in another of the land in question, and wait upon the birds for

5: Roth E-4 (no date) 1892 CCo Iban CCo

243 787 three days in succession until they hear either a note of warning to keep away from it, or a note of encouragement to remain on it. If the auguries are favourable they proceed to denude the ● 313 land of its forest. Both sexes share in this labour; the women and boys clear away the undergrowth and the men fell the trees. Much valuable timber is then destroyed, as they spare [222] only such fruit trees as are in full bearing, and those upon which the bees settle and from which they expect to be able to gather wild honey. As some of the trees are of enormous girth being furnished with buttresses, they do not always fell them at the base, but more often some distance up the trunk: others they leave standing altogether, merely lopping off the boughs to feed the fire which is afterwards to lay bare the ground and manure the soil.

243 313 372 783 784 When the land has been fully cleared it is left to dry. Sun and wind are now of almost vital consequence to the Dyaks, for if they are unable to thoroughly burn this immense mass of timber, famine stares them in the face for the year to come. If it pour with rain day after day and week after week, and there is no promise of continued fine weather, they are apt to imagine that some impurity has defiled the tribe and that the face of the Great Spirit is hid from them. So the elders of the people get to work to find it out, and adjudicate on all cases of incest and bigamy, and purify the earth with the blood of pigs. Prayers are offered to *Betara* from one end of the country to the other; for the space of three days the villages are tabued, and all labour is discontinued; the inhabitants remain at home, and strangers are not admitted. But if the weather is warm and dry the farms are ready in a very few days for the burning. They are set on fire from the windward side when the breeze is blowing, and soon the entire mass is seething with flames. It is a magnificent spectacle to behold when several of these farms are ablaze at once, and the hills are flaring like volcanoes. The heat at this season caused by the universal burning is almost insupportable; for days not a glimpse is to be caught of the blue sky overhead; the smoke hangs over the country like a heavy cloud, and the sun glows through the fog like a globe of molten copper.

243 When the fire has exhausted itself and the ground is again cool, which it soon is from the frequency of rain in this country, they commence to sow the seed. The men traverse the farm with dibblers in their hands and dibble the ground; the women follow and drop in the paddy seed and cover up the holes by scraping earth into them with their feet. Indian corn (*lingkau*) is planted sparingly at the same time: and as it is ripe and off the ground within three months from the date of the sowing, it does not

7:Gomes M-5 (ca. 1890)1911 OC6 Iban OC6

sary for their work. They go to some town, and from it they make journeys into the surrounding jungle, returning after intervals of a month or more to sell the gutta they have succeeded in obtaining, and to buy provisions.

The way in which the Dyak works gutta is this :—He wanders in the jungle till he finds a gutta-tree. He cuts it down, and rings it neatly all along the trunk and branches at intervals of a foot or two with a kind of hollow chisel that he brings with him for the purpose. Under each ring he puts a leaf made into a cup to catch the milk-white sap which slowly exudes. Into each of these he puts a little scraped bark of the tree. Then he collects all the sap, and boils it until the gutta is precipitated at the bottom of the pot like a mass of dough. This is taken out while it is still soft, placed upon a board, and kneaded vigorously with the hands, and afterwards trodden with the bare feet. When it is almost too stiff to work, it is flattened out carefully, and then rolled into a wedge-shaped mass. A hole is punched through the thin end, through which a string is put to carry it, and it is ready for sale. This crude gutta has a mottled or marbled light brown appearance, which is given to it by the scraped bark which is mixed with it. The juice of the wild fig-tree (*Ficus*) or of the different species of bread-fruit trees (*Artocarpus*) is sometimes used to adulterate it.

Sometimes, instead of working gutta, the Dyaks earn money by collecting canes, or *rotan*. A journey is made by a party of them to some jungle region where canes abound, and they collect the various marketable species of the genus *Calamus*. These canes are creeping plants the stems of which are covered with a hard flinty bark.

7:Gomes M-5 (ca. 1890)1911 OC6 Iban OC6

313 The leaves are very thorny, and cling to the trees and branches around. The older part of the cane has no leaves. It is very tough and strong, and in size about one-quarter of an inch in diameter. It is easily split, and used for the seats of chairs, etc.

222 439 Sometimes the Dyaks join others in the collection of edible birds'-nests for the Chinese market. This is a great industry in those parts of Borneo where there are large limestone caves, in which these nests are found. The caves are farmed out by Government, and whatever is obtained over the amount paid to Government is the profit of the workers. In Upper Sarawak certain tribes possess caves in which edible birds'-nests are found, and they divide the nests with the Government.

222 Sometimes Dyaks who wish to earn a little extra money go and help these tribes in collecting birds'-nests, and get a share of the profits, or more often they go to small caves which belong to no one in particular and collect birds'-nests for themselves, and then give a share of what they find to the Government.

Some of the caves in which edible birds'-nests are found are very large. At the entrance the visitor is met by thousands of bats and swallows. The latter resemble the common swallow in appearance, but are only half as large. These small swallows make the edible nests. Inside, the cave is often like an immense amphitheatre roofed like a dome, the middle of which is over a thousand feet high. Thousands of nests are seen clinging to the pillar-like rocky sides and roof. The most flimsy-looking stages of bamboos tied together with cane are the simple means employed by the natives to collect the nests from the seemingly most inaccessible positions. [417]

Though there are rifts in the sides through which come

195 of their migrations, encouragement of rubber planting, and establish-
171 ment in the Land and Survey Department of an external authority to
423 validate land tenure radically changed the social organization of the Ibans who responded to his Government, as they became sedentary and
[113] oriented to a cash economy. The practice of preserving lengthy genealogies for validating land holdings, typical of shifting cultivators, is virtually extinct among Sibu Ibans, for authority now is invested in the surat tanah ("land letter"). Although not all land in the District is held under permit or has been surveyed, yet there is none that can be described as unclaimed or undesignated on land maps.

7. Protector of Resources

115 The development of Sibu as a center for the administration of
657 resources included the establishment of the Forest Department in 1919. The Department has responsibility for the constitution and administration of various categories of forests, for example, those that may be exploited by timber companies and those that may not be.

197 The florescence of the timber industry in the late 1940's and
657 from the 1950's on, required overall supervision to insure against the
313 indiscriminate felling of forests. Of concern to the Ibans were those forests that were important to them for the wood for their longhouses and the products that they collected for sale. The rapidly expanding timber operations struck fear among many Ibans that the forests and

18:Sutlive E,M-5 (1957-1971) 1973 OC6 Iban OC6 Sibu

their valuable products would be irretrievably lost. As a result, petitions were made by the tuai rumah of many longhouses, and where possible and reasonable,[27] the Department constituted communal forests which could not be opened for commercial exploitation by timber companies, but were the preserves of the respective communities.

The constitution of some forests by the Department as Native Forest Reserves has permitted the exploitation of such forests by logging companies, and a share of the value of the timber to be divided among the tuai rumah and their anembiak holding customary rights to the forest. This has been a profitable business both for the timber companies and enterprising Ibans; for the companies, controlled by Chinese[28] as described in Chapter One, have had to give gifts and make payments in order to procure licenses to clear the forests through the tuai rumah.

With the booming timber prices and the Ibans' desire for cash, coupled with the strategic position they hold vis-a-vis the Native Forest

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[27] In some instances, tuai rumah did not make petitions until all land contiguous their longhouses had been allocated to other houses, or made applications for land some distance away, claiming customary rights that they were unable to substantiate.

[28] Under law, Chinese operators, are required to have a specified number of Iban "partners." While adhering to the letter of the law, Chinese still maintain effective control of timber and sawmill operators.

177 Reserves, some have been able to use their ethnic membership and pangkat
657 ("title") to advantage in maximizing the financial opportunity. For
313 example, those pengulu and tuai rumah who have been able to gain control of forests sought by timber operators have been able to convert these political advantages to personal economic benefit.

177 The competition for forest resources and the profits to be gained
477 from them is fierce, and sometimes it is carried on in ways that con-
313 travene local forest regulations. Accusations and counter-accusations have been made about claim-jumping and gift-giving. For example, Ibans from the Igan have entered claims to tracts in Naman; one man from Bawang Assan obtained a license for operations in Assan; and several men collaborated in an abortive attempt to obtain rights over a vast forest on the Oya River. Because of alleged contraventions, both "little fish" and "big fish", to use the local expression, have been brought to court and sometimes found guilty of the charges.[29]

8. Permits and Probate

177 A further development of the growing power of Sibu as an admin-
428 istrative center in the lives of the Ibans of the District is the number
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[29] The former include claim jumpers or those who seek to defraud by taking money in advance on forests to which they have no claims; the latter include a former Superintendent of Forests, Sibu, who though acquitted in his trial was forced to leave Sarawak, and towkays who have been charged with mismanagement.